

Tallahassee's King Conquers Overseas Markets

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Inventor and business owner Arthur Aveling knows quite well the value of international business and how to find it.

After 10 years as an exporter, Aveling's Tallahassee-based King Arthur's Tools has expanded overseas to serve customers in 39 countries. The business develops and markets specialized cutting and finishing tools for wood carving and other applications.

"I went to a trade show in April of 1998," said Aveling, a native of Australia who became a U.S. citizen recently. "I met an English gentleman who was enthralled with our tools and thought they would do well in England."

Through that business contact he found out about a dealer in Norway and an additional show event. He and wife Pamela, the company's executive vice president, also learned that there were people overseas who already knew about King Arthur's Tools, but had no local source for purchasing them.

From those early efforts came the foundation for relationships with foreign dealers and distributors. The Avelings also participate in an annual Norwegian woodturning cruise that winds its way along the coast there. During the trip wood artisans and hobbyists learn the latest techniques and get to meet the Arthur behind the tool business.

More recently, the company branched into two additional markets — taxidermy and the hoof trimming necessary for horses and other animals.

"I think the secret to their success, from what I've seen, is they are niche markets," said Allen DeWolf, national sales manager for King Arthur's Tools. The products chip, cut, grind and sand. "The function of the tool is always the same. The difference is the end user."

DeWolf met a dairy owner in Georgia whom he introduced to the company's Merlin cutting tool, which the customer discovered could replace the typical knife used to trim a cow's hooves. Merlin was an instant hit.

"He still has that tool," DeWolf said of the dairyman. "He wouldn't give it back. He said if I wanted it back, I would have to fight him for it."

The Avelings recommend investing time in building bonds with customers. It is the users of the company's products that provide input and ideas on their application. A side benefit of that has been friendships with artists worldwide who send samples of their woodwork to the company for display in its showroom.

"I think that's a big piece. If you take care of your customers, they will take care of you," Pamela Aveling said.